The Library of the Whispering Woods

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The Library of the Whispering Woods

by lefemmerouge

Summary

"...It was a miracle the library had never been found, even when the Horde's armies went across the Whispering Woods unimpeded...this library was, in its own way, a magical space with never-ending potential and promise"

A continuation from part 2 of this series, where Samurai Jack went to the Crystal Castle with Bow, Glimmer, and Adora as part of their quest.

Notes

A revised/second attempt at this fic is available at Squidge World, entitled "Mysteries, the Imposing (But Welcoming) Library in the Whispering Woods, and Knowledge", with revisions including rewriting dialogue, improving lines, and the like! On 12/15/24, the revised text was added here, overwritting the previous flawed text.

Comments are welcome and appreciated.

See the end of the work for more notes

They soon approached the library, relatively hidden in the Whispering Woods, awed by its imposing presence. In fact, if you hadn't visited it before, it was unlikely you would find it, creating a sort of catch-22. The library's exterior was surrounded by blueish trees. It had blue vines covering part of the front facade.

The stone structure was a mix of shades of purple, from dark to light, accompanied by ornate architecture. The designs could be those of the First Ones, but it also may have been designed by Bow's dads, or part of his extended family. Approaching the front entrance, there was a grand tower, almost like it was made of ivory, making clear it represented the pinnacle of knowledge.

They had come to this place because it had the largest collection of artifacts and writings of the First Ones in all Etheria, making it an essential resource. It was a miracle the library had never been found, even when the Horde's armies went across the Whispering Woods unimpeded, when it froze over after Entrapta had "hacked" the Black Garnet runestone and tinkered with the planet's delicate balance. Perhaps, it was like Mystacor, shielded from outside view, but it seemed unlikely.

Bow, with Glimmer, Adora, and Jack beside him, knocked on the door. Lance, Bow's dad, enthusiastically answered. "Please come in!"

He had a darker skin-complexion than his son, Bow, a shade of milk chocolate brown skin, and mid-length black dreadlocks. He wore glasses, a white robe, a mauve purple blouse, a burgundy sash, and white socks inside his sandals. His partner, George, who had short closely-cropped black hair (which was greying) and a well-groomed mustache, was sitting by the fire.

He also wore a tunic with a heart motif and apparently had tattoo saying "lunch," in the writing of the First Ones, on his left arm. He was, apart from being Bow's other dad, shorter than Lance and had a slightly lighter skin-complexion, a skin which had a shade of browned caramel.

In this family library, there were couches to sit on. This made clear this place, which had two levels, was *open* to visitors and researchers. The first floor had exhibit pieces, some books, artifacts, and other items, with lights hanging down from the ceiling, illuminating the room. The second floor, which could be accessed by climbing the curved stairs from the first floor, held most of the materials, even ancient weapons. They were kept for historical purposes. The library, damaged after the elemental monster had been released during their last visit (when Adora whispered the password: Eternia), was still being repaired.

As they entered, George welcomed them. He offered them drinks and food. Everyone, but Jack, declined his offer. Like had in the past, he asked for some hot water, so he could have a soup of sorts, using a mix he had inside his kimono. Lance then re-entered, asking them to leave their weapons outside the library's main hall, and then inquired why they had come.

Bow carefully talked about how they had gone to a temple built by the First Ones in the Crimson Waste and found more about the message on his tracker pad. While Lance grimaced,

telling them they *should* have stayed away, he was glad they were alright. Bow explained how he had downloaded information from the temple's computer system, which had a message showing a baby girl looking like Adora, before she had been taken by the Horde, and featured those who looked to be her parents. Fascinated, Lance got the projector.

Near the fire, where George was heating up more water in a pot, he asked Jack about himself, since he was always interested to meet Bow's friends. Jack told him how he had come to Etheria through a portal of sorts. Hewanted to go back in time but was transported through dimensions instead. Intrigued, he asked Jack where he was from, and how he ended up with Bow, Glimmer, and Adora. He explained how he had encountered them in the Crimson Waste and after a short fight with Adora (as She-Ra), and had joined them in their quest to rid Etheria of evil, to turn darkness into light.

Taking a break from talking to Jack, George unveiled the library's catalog. He cheerfully told them how the library once had a paper catalog but now used a digital system of sorts on a computer. The number of new items being acquired and added to the library's collections necessitated a different system of organization. With a digital system, it was easier to find relevant items, rather than relying on their own memories, which were fallible.

During the last visit by Glimmer, Adora, and Bow, Lance and George had been able to tell them where the materials on Serenia had been located. That was *only* because they had studied the subject of Serenia extensively as some of the most prominent scholars of the First Ones in all of Etheria. As two gay historians who lived in this giant, beautiful library, they were not alone in this endeavor. Bow's 12 other siblings were also historians. Since the library's collections were easily searchable, those such as Adora, Bow, and Glimmer, who were relatively familiar with such technology, could easily access the records, even though they came from different circumstances. Even Jack could easily use the catalog, although there was a bit of a learning curve for him when it came to technology.

Lance explained the reason he and George had wanted Bow to take over the library when they retired. He then chuckled. "You young people have a better knack for technology than old geezers like us!"

He explained how he thought Bow would know how to use the technology better than them. While noting that they *both* took a neutral stance in the ongoing conflict, he acknowledged they still accepted Bow's choice to fight for the rebellion, as supportive parents, and were making arrangements to ensure the library's future. Smiling, he remarked that Bow could work on the library's system while he was there. Pausing yet again, he asked himself what he had been doing. George reminded him he was getting a projector to display the video these weary travelers watched when they were in the Crimson Waste temple.

Turning on the projector, and connecting it to the tracker pad, he began watching the video on a huge screen. He *immediately* noticed something. It wasn't the resemblance of the baby to Adora, having the same eyes and hair, the dress design of the woman who held the baby, or the man holding the laser rifle. Instead, it was a message on the screen behind the woman. Zooming in, he saw the following message:

SUBJECT: ADORA EROS

AGE: 12 DAYS

BIRTHPLACE: ETERNIA

Lance dated the video to November 15th, noting it was 17 or 18 years old from what he could tell, from his knowledge of Etheria's history. He already knew the word "Adora" meant someone who is adored, beloved, or a gift, and the word "Eros" meant strong in some languages. In conjunction, this meant she would be a strong and beloved person, clearly well-named by her parents.

Considering Lance's finding, this would mean Adora's parents *were not* First Ones. They would have come, with her, from outside the world, settling in Etheria, maybe even crash-landing on the planet by accident. Adora was shocked, even though she had the realization she knew all this, somehow, already. For her, the connection to Light Hope and the visions she had after touching the Sword of Protection, made more sense.

Of course, this video, on its own, did not help them decode the message on Bow's tracker pad. However, the library had many resources available they could use to get further information. In this library, nothing was excluded regardless of the background, origin, or beliefs leading to the item's creation.

Lance smiled. He clicked a few buttons and he cross-referenced the people in the video with those in the library's video archives. He found a match, not for Adora or her parents, but rather for the flower patterns on the dress worn by the woman in the video. They were the same ones found painted on the sides of the ships piloted by the First Ones which had been recovered after their crash into the planet.

Could this mean there was a relation between Adora's parents and the First Ones, a sort of ancestral link? It seemed to be an inevitable and made clear previously unknown history of Etheria: waves of settlement from other planets not just by the First Ones but by others, which could be called the Second Ones, Third Ones, and so on.

This revelation was not completely unexpected. Lance, like George, knew the First Ones had settled Etheria over 1,000 years before, coming on spaceships from another planet. There were many historical gaps from then to the present. While many records were destroyed during the awful, bloody war between Etherians and the Horde, the evidence of colonization by the First Ones was clear.

The library's materials included writings from the First Ones and those fighting the Horde, and from Horde soldiers themselves. Like any good library, it had information which presented all points of view and cooperated with all peoples who resisted restrictions on free expression and access to ideas. But this also meant any creature would be allowed to use the library, no matter their background, age, views, or other characteristics.

As such, exhibits and other rooms were available to all equitably, regardless of the affiliations or beliefs of those who wanted to use them. This was the *real reason* the library had not been destroyed by the Horde. As much as they wanted to crush the Rebellion, the knowledge within the library was helpful to them as well, which they used for their own evil and nefarious uses. As a result, the library was, in some senses, neutral ground. But, of course, no

institution can be truly neutral. The fact that Bow was fighting for the Rebellion made his dads think about scrapping neutrality altogether.

Deep into the topic, Lance turned to Adora. "What do you think of all of this?"

She didn't know how to respond. It was *a lot* to take in. On the other hand, she wanted to know more about her past, something Shadow Weaver had previously tried to convince her was unimportant to her. She emphasized her upbringing in the Fright Zone and nothing else.

"While I still have to process this," Adora sheepishly remarked. "But...I want to learn more, about where I come from. Otherwise, I'm nothing better than a former Horde soldier with a magic sword!"

Her shouts echoed across the library's rooms. While she came to this realization, Jack remembered his past, the evils of Aku, who had burned his hometown, and his loving parents who he would never see again. He shed a tear, touched by Adora's desire to learn about her past, even though he had traveled *much further* on his quest to defeat Aku.

Glimmer, who'd been patient this whole time, was getting restless. "Ugh, not more learning. We came here to get answers! I still have a lot of questions!"

George, previously talking with Jack (up to this point), came in and *tried* to comfort her. "I know you have a lot of questions, but with the information we have inside the walls of this great library, you can have them answered."

As a corollary, he smiled and added, "we are both here not to answer your questions but to help you find the answers to them, to continue the quest for knowledge."

Organization and access to the library materials proved him right. Some materials, in their diverse and inclusive collections, that certain people on Etheria would have considered objectionable, were included, allowing for all sides of a query, for a specific information need, to be explored. Every year, or whenever necessary, the library's collections were reviewed, with obsolete and decaying materials disposed of in a way fitting archival institutions, if they had existed in Etheria.

However, when the material was acquired, and added to the library's collections, it was not altered in any way, shape or form. Furthermore, the materials were organized by subject, although such organization did not imply endorsement of the contents within. Unlike other locations, there were no meeting rooms. Rather, there were spaces for further contemplation and study, both of which were freely and openly available.

The open exchange of knowledge was the primary goal of Bow's dads. They were not only historians but librarians of sorts, specifically for this special library, with features which would, in another universe, be befitting of an archives. Their open public access catalog and other technology were always being improved. But it was adequate, for the time being, in ensuring the accessibility of the library's collections to current and future users.

George and Lance were big champions of access to information and materials in an equitable manner, although the community they served was relatively insular: it *mostly* consisted of their immediate family. Still, the library's collections were relatively diverse in terms of language and culture, while the difficult and oppressive histories of the materials preserved and collected were fully recognized.

Even so, they were not as aware of differences between themselves and those their library was serving, since Bow's 12 brothers were all historians. Despite this, they reflected on their choices and decisions daily, building upon previous family relationships in order to ensure the library was meeting their needs. While they were invested emotionally in their work, this did not mean they always have a willing heart and smile, as they were, at times, frustrated. Like anyone else, they could, at times, experience burnout and become tired, not always enjoying their work in equal amounts all the time.

Lance was especially interested in doing an oral history interview with Adora. It was the perfect chance to not only learn about the First Ones but the powers of She-Ra. While he was a self-taught historian, like his partner, he was skilled in conducting oral histories, as he had interviewed fellow peoples of Etheria in the past. Turning to Adora and filled with delight, he encouraged her to answer a few questions.

While she was unsure of his goals, she was convinced by his argument: her story would help those in the future who wanted to know about She-Ra. As she was about to follow Lance to a side room on the library's first floor for the interview, she ran to the table where the Sword of Protection was sitting, grabbed it, and then rejoined him.

All the contents of the interview would stay confidential and only revealed upon her death. In the meantime, Bow, Glimmer, and Jack gathered around the fireplace with George, who lamented their search at the library may have not been as fruitful or productive as it should have been. However, he added, they could all form the "best research squad" and look through the library's holdings for answers! This library was, in its own way, a magical space with never-ending potential and promise. It made the visit there seem like a quest, even though it was not dangerous, unlike the rest of the Whispering Woods. Instead, it was a repository of knowledge that could help them all find answers.

Using the catalog, George brought together all the items on "Mara," "Serenia," and "constellations," and put them on the nearby table. While some claimed Adora was the only one who could read First One writings, this was completely false. George and Lance could read them too, although not as well.

To them, the language of the First Ones was not dead but was alive and well, although this wasn't the case across Etheria. Jack wasn't sure how all this would help him. He just wanted a portal so he could go back to his time and place so he could defeat Aku, something he had been striving for years upon years. He was antsy and wanted to run off to the Fright Zone to use the portal Light Hope had talked about. Just when he wanted to leave, while Bow and Glimmer were going through the materials George had brought before them, frustrated they couldn't put the message together, a book was put down right in front of him. It was titled *Dimensional Travel for the Weary*. George cackled.

"This is one of my favorite books. I forgot to bring it out earlier. Hopefully, it has information which you can use to return to your own time."

Jack, reading the book in front of him, found some poignant truths about dimensional travel. He read about how the previous She-Ra had, without telling anyone, stranded Etheria and its surrounding moons in a desolate dimension of Desparado, almost destroying the planet in the process.

The authors wrote about how no one knew why she engaged in this reckless act, it was speculated she wanted to desperately save the planet from the Horde, although this strategy was not successful. As a result of this action, She-Ra was separated from the Sword of Protection by Light Hope and sentenced to spend the rest of her life as an ordinary Etherian, named Maura, never allowed to hold the sword ever again.

Even though Jack was enjoying learning this backstory, he *really* wanted to know about how someone could go between different dimensions. He turned to a chapter titled "The basics of dimensional travel." It was explained while time travel was possible within one dimension, with the proper technology, dimensional travel was trickier, as it required going across various universes, which may have different conditions. As a result, such travel had *never* been attempted since the First Ones, Etheria's first settlers, had come to the planet many years ago.

Meanwhile, George, Glimmer, and Bow continued to look through the items. While Glimmer and Bow could not read the writings of the First Ones, they organized the similar-looking items together, the least they could do. Bow was annoyed by this whole exercise since he was a fighter, a warrior, and an inventor, not a scholar. Glimmer felt similarly, growing more impatient. Both felt uneasy when they heard Adora shouting, "By the Power of Greyskull!," through the walls.

George, through his patient and understanding demeanor, kept them on track. He then had an a-ha moment. He found a scroll which explained partly what Serenia meant: it was the name of a First One who built the planet's supercomputer, naming it M.A.R.A. Right nearby was a scroll which named this acronym: Memory Adapter & Realtime Array, from what he could make out.

While it was a clunky name, several questions were answered: the message the tracker pad had intercepted could be a transmission from the remaining parts of this computer. Bow and Glimmer realized the Crimson Waste temple and Crystal Castle housed parts of this supercomputer!

Even though they were not making this connection, the holographic persona of Light Hope, tasked to be the facilitator of Etheria, was clearly only one manifestation of the computer's programming. Little did they know but Entrapta was, in some ways, more knowledgeable on the subject. Even before she had joined the Horde, her research of the First One's technology made it clear the computer had been horribly damaged in the past, even though she was not aware that the actions of Maura, the previous She-Ra, had caused it to happen. Therefore, she was aware of further deposits of the First One's technology across the planet.

Hordak, on the other hand, cared little about this history. He saw Entrapta as a way to acquire this ancient technology, improve their weapons, and conquer the Rebellion once and for all. He wanted to ensure that the planet was under control of the Horde, without anyone else getting in the way. He was, after all, from another planet, and had come to Etheria many years ago from a planet known as Horde Prime. He had been stranded on Etheria when the previous She-Ra had moved the planet through the dimensions, moving it away from his home world. It was his hope he could return to Horde Prime, with the inter-dimensional portal, bring in reinforcements, and crush the Rebellion in a decisive blow. Due to his disappointment with Catra's past failures, he kept this plan secret from her. Instead, he would lead the strengthened force against the Rebellion *himself.*

Adora re-entered the main room of the library, laughing as Lance stood beside her. She was dressed in her usual garb, although she held the Sword of Protection in her right hand, which had been transformed into a gold cup with a runestone. She was drinking, what seemed to be tea. Like Adora, he also held tea in his hand.

Bow and Glimmer were surprised by the camaraderie between them but continued organizing the materials in front of them, even though they had no idea what she and Lance talked about in private. Lance asked George what they had found out. Excitedly, George told him about what they had learned, especially about the M.A.R.A. computer, the person who built it, and where the message came from.

This brought up the obvious question: where was the mainframe of this computer and where was the message, they had received, transmitted from? Adora jumped in, explaining how they had gone to an abandoned outpost in the Whispering Woods, broadcasting holographic greetings from the First Ones, and how the message appeared on Bow's pad afterward. But she didn't know anything more, as the message was shrouded in mystery.

As the sun was setting, Bow and Glimmer stood up and were ready to go, tired of categorizing items, a hapless task as they saw it. For them, the library had given them enough of an answer to move on to the next part of their quest. While George and Lance were dismayed, they reminded Bow and Glimmer that weary souls, such as themselves, would be welcomed with open arms at the library anytime in the foreseeable future. Adora smiled, promising she would return in order to learn more about She-Ra. Having nowhere else to go, Jack decided to join them. Being gracious, he left the book about dimensional travel on the table where George had originally put it.

Bow, Glimmer, Adora, and Jack said their goodbyes. They would quest onward, although they were not sure where they would go next. Their task was to use the information they learned to help the people of Etheria defeat the evil Horde from conquering the planet. While it was time to rest and relax somewhere other than the library, the spookiness of the Whispering Woods awaited them...

End Notes

I'd like to thank not only a summary of the last episode of She-Ra and the Princesses of Power, "Reunion," by bleedingcool.com, the fandom page for George and Lance, and various Twitter users who talked about the library in various tweets.* I took some inspiration from the last episode and incorporated it into this story. I used Behind the Name for the meanings behind their names. In getting the skin shades of George and Lance right, I used "8 Different Shades of Brown Skin, Which Tone Do You Have" by Sloane Betz on That Sister. Also, since I'm working on my MLIS degree right now, this work, in that sense, was close to my heart, which is why the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, interpretation of those rights, posts on April Hathcock's blog on April 3, 2019 ("Value, Care Work, and Paypal") and March 28, 2018 ("Criticalizing Our Work: Timucua Language Collection") were incorporated into this story, along with my observations about the library from the "Reunion" episode. This work aims to be more positive about librarians than ones like "Sinnerman" by Punk_in Docs, a massive library described in "Hoarders of Knowledge" by DrabblingSparks, and different from others that mention libraries (like "page by dog-eared page" by benwvatt, "Turn the Page" by zebraljb, "Check Out" by raidelle, "To Whom It May Concern" by knightinmourning, "Rewarding Good Behavior" by MrsRen, "Open Mic" by bendingsignpost, "Falling's Only Natural" by natural_by_design, "See You in Class" by ARustySpork, and "Of Librarians and Men" by lizardsonline to name a few). As such, posts like Ashley Hay's "14 Fictional Libraries to Check Out," Pen Shepard's "7 Mysterious Libraries in Literature," Emily Temple's "The Best Fictional Libraries in Pop Culture," Ashley Mullins' "A Long Overdue Nod to SciFi and Fantasy’s Best Librarians," Katherine Monasterio's "5 Fictional Libraries We’d Love to Visit," Lacey deShazo's "A Roundup of Fierce Fictional Librarians," Stuart Kells' "Voices in Time: The Magic of Fictional Libraries," Tera Lynn Childs' "Favorite Fictional Libraries," Rose Moore's "Most Dangerous Fictional Libraries in Pop Culture" were helpful in inspiring more ideas for how to finish this chapter.

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